

News Release

For Immediate Release

USDA Farm Service Agency
PO Box 670
Bozeman, MT 59771-0670

January 26, 2007

For More Information:

Randy Johnson 406/587-6772
Dick Deschamps 406/587-6875

Reorganizing FSA – What does that mean to Montana producers?

Bozeman— For the past several months the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) has been faced with the challenge of reviewing the organizational structure of the agency to meet the needs of the changing agricultural industry and to adjust to on-going budget short falls. This week, at a statewide meeting of county committee members and Farm Service Agency (FSA) employees in Great Falls, the FSA state committee announced the final plan for shifting the way FSA does business across Montana.

“The closure of FSA offices across the state has been a very hard decision, but has been developed from the bottom up,” stated Randy Johnson, FSA State Executive Director. “Through the closure process we can place FSA employees where the workload is and strategically position the agency for future demands.” “We cannot continue to spread too few employees and dollars over too many offices.”

The plan includes:

- The closure of seven FSA offices across Montana including Lewis and Clark, Meagher, Park, Ravalli, Sanders, Sweet Grass, and Treasure. These offices will be consolidated with neighboring counties. Producers served by an office which is closed will have the choice to do business with any office in a contiguous county.
- Re-distribution of staff to be placed in offices where workload is the highest. The consolidation of offices would increase staffing levels of employees statewide.
- Employee retention. No FSA employee will be forced out of employment due to a consolidation action. In the seven offices targeted for closure, there are ten employees affected. All employees will be offered employment in the receiving office of the closure.
- Increased utilization of technology capabilities. To reduce producer visits to FSA offices: 1) toll-free phone numbers will be utilized; 2) increased opportunities for clients to do business remotely through mail, fax, e-mail or web-based applications; and 3) providing a periodic presence in strategic locations in closed counties such as informational meetings, application sign-up meetings, and FSA office days.
- A commitment to providing increased producer education of programs administered by FSA and what is needed to receive benefits from those programs. Increased education will reduce the amount of time clients spend applying for program benefits at their local FSA office.

The final plan will be submitted to the National FSA headquarters for their review and acceptance in the next few weeks. After review and concurrence by the FSA national headquarters, the Appropriations and Agricultural Committees of both the US House of Representatives and the US Senate will be notified of the plan. Concurrently with that notification process, public meetings will be held in those communities affected by the office closures. A final decision will then be made on the plan and implementation will begin.

Reorganizing FSA – What does that mean to Montana producers?
Page 2

“I know some producers and communities are concerned about closing their offices,” said Johnson. “I want them to know that we’ll be doing everything we can to ensure they will continue to receive the same excellent service they have always experienced at FSA. This can and will be a good thing for Montana,” added Johnson.

The current FSA was originally organized during the dust bowl days of the 1930’s as the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) to provide financial assistance to farmers and ranchers. To learn more about programs administered by FSA in Montana, logon to the Montana FSA website at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/mt>.

-30-